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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE U.S.A.

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Division of Overseas Ministries
475 Riverside Drive, New York, N.Y. 10027

Telex: RCA 224579 Cable: Dominicus
Telephone: (212) 870-2424

William P. Thompson, President

Claire Randall, General Secretary

R

Argentina

RIGHTS OFFICE

Wipfler Director

The Honorable Alexander Haig
Secretary of State
United States State Department
Washington, D.C. 20520

July 17, 1981

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to you in my capacity as Director of the Human Rights Office of the National Council of Churches. My responsibilities in human rights research, advocacy and education has kept me in constant touch with the human rights situations in Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile and Argentina. The current critical condition of human rights is well-known to me.

It was with deep distress, therefore, that I learned of the Administration's policy decision to support development loans to these countries. I wish to convey my concern with your argument that "the improvement" of the human rights situation "has been dramatic," (New York Times, July 15, 1981). While I do not have access to the documents on which this new State Department position is based, from what has been reported in the press of your statements, I feel that the Administration is formulating its policy on cosmetic changes within these governments which have not, in reality, improved the human rights situation.

In Paraguay, at the end of 1980, 32 persons were being held for political reasons, more than half of whom had not had charges brought against them, several of whom had been tortured and some who had not received adequate treatment for serious medical problems. This year, in February, five journalists were arrested without charges and at least two of them tortured, a violation not only of the right to personal security, but also a powerful deterrent to the exercise of freedom of expression and the press. In addition to the frequent incidents of torture, prison sentences which are arbitrarily extended, re-arrests and violation of the writ of habeas corpus, treatment of the Toba Maskoy Indians has been termed "genocidal" by Church authorities in Paraguay.

In Argentina, human rights organizations, labor unions, political parties and members of the press are continually harassed. Between 6000 (documented) and 20,000 (estimated) persons are still unaccounted for by the government; from 1000 to 15000 political prisoners are still being detained, some 900 of them have been held for as long as five years without charges and most have been tortured. Finally, in 1981, at least four well-documented cases of relatively short disappearances have occurred; in each instance the victim had been tortured and while three were released alive, the body of Horacio Castro was found riddled with 30 bullets.

In Chile, an unusually high number of arrests and especially flagrant cases of torture occurred in March 1981. During April, May, and mid-June, scores of doctors, students and political dissidents were arrested with

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
Exemption(s):
☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny
Declassify: ☐ In Part ☐ In Full
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little regard for personal security including protection against torture and prompt knowledge of charges against them. This year, at least 500 people have been sent into the harsh conditions of internal exile. Finally, most human rights specialists see the new constitution, particularly Article 24, as a carte blanche for the government to increase its violations of human rights and decreases the possibility of a legal defense against those violations. This is quite contrary to the State Department opinion that it is an element in the "transition" to a more democratic government.

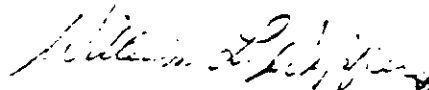
In Uruguay, according to a confidential report of the International Red Cross in 1980, conditions are inhumane in the Libertad Prison, which houses 1000 political prisoners. From December to May 1981, six political prisoners have died under questionable circumstances and other prisoners have disappeared from the prison. Furthermore, the government violated press freedom on April 11, 1981, by closing the offices of Opinar, an opposition newspaper. The newspaper opposed the government's policy of "institutionalisation", a term defined by the Index on Censorship as the "official phrase used to denote the restructuring of the country's political and government institutions along authoritarian lines."

It is clear from the above that these four governments "engage in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights, such as torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment, prolonged detention without charges, or other flagrant denials to life, liberty, and the security of person." (Authorization for International Financial Institutions FY 1977, Section 701).

I must conclude this letter by again expressing my profound disagreement based on the documented facts presented above, with this new policy of approving loans to these countries.

If I can be of any assistance to you in providing further information on violations of human rights in these countries, I am entirely at your disposal.

Sincerely,



William L. Wipfler